

Liam Gillick

CASEY KAPLAN

“The state itself becomes a super whatnot”—whatever! I so want to believe in Liam Gillick’s post-Fordist cosmology of poeticized socio-economic rhetoric. Alas, the elegant array of new works grouped here under the aforementioned title phrase merely reconstitutes Gillick’s ongoing project: the instrumentalization of codes of (neo)Minimalism and (neo)Conceptualism, inflected by rather soft, ingratiating contextual/situational tactics. His enterprise engenders a variant of intellectual ventriloquism: Decorative object-structures are deployed to give voice to a broader ideational framework (supplemented by an obligatory press release spun in the language of hazy social relevance).

Structured so as to be self-referential, the show proposed a closed binary system of formal/structural relationships. The title was writ large on the entry wall in slick black vinyl letters; this is actually a work in and of itself, a neo-Conceptualist conceit laced with hip design aesthetics. On the wall of the next room was a reordering of the title (THE WHATNOT ITSELF BECOMES A SUPER STATE), which linguistically framed four works: *Between Kalmar and Udevalla*, 2008, a wall-based sculpture that, comprising forty powder-coated-aluminum slatlike elements, resembles a large multicolored radiator unit; *Sometimes They Worked in Groups of Three*, 2008, a large, red, freestanding, rectilinear structure made of aluminum and Plexiglas; *Status Following Closure*, 2008, a much narrower, freestanding, rectilinear structure composed of the same materials in multiple colors; and a wall-installed ventilation-unit-like work, *Projected Retraction*, 2008.

The next room featured two sculptures that remix the structures and colors of the works in the previous space. *Lapsed Reduction*, 2008, for instance, fuses the red color scheme of *Sometimes They Worked in Groups of Three* with the perpendicularity of *Status Following Closure*, while *Rescinded Production*, 2008, suggests a crossbreeding of *Status Following Closure*’s chromatic array with the architectonics of *Sometimes They Worked in Groups of Three*. Lastly, a relatively inconspicuous entry, the 1988 *Prototype Double Mounted Wall Rail* (a blue-gray object hung high on the wall), refers to Gillick’s own history of being preoccupied with the relations between reductive sculptural aesthetics, architectural design, and art’s contextual and spatial frame. Each work here is tightly calibrated in its conception, design, and execution, and the formal confluences are indeed clever. Gillick employs abstraction (aesthetic and social) to signify everything and nothing (the “whatnot” of the title, perhaps?), building reductive structures that transmit meaning as if it were meaningless.

Now, back to the mother of it all, the beating heart of the enterprise, the exhibition’s brain trust: the press release. The works here,

according to the release, relate to “*Construccion de Uno*” (Construction of One), a text around which Gillick has been making work since 2004. We read that this body of work “evolve[s] from Gillick’s research of past and present evaluations of the aesthetics of social systems by focusing on modes of production rather than consumption”; that it emerges out of an inquiry into “Brazilian research into Scandinavian car production” and into the ways in which workers have rethought modes of production. The release goes on to indicate that this is ultimately a “scenario” (the fab, sexy term of the past few moments), reverberating on itself in a series of linguistic and structural moves that “mark the site of the exhibition as an extension of the complex processes of democratic deferral and infinite sub-contracting that underscore our current processes of exchange.” It’s hard to determine whether this is trenchant analysis, the masking of obscure rumination behind the discursive smog of low-cal critical inquiry . . . or somehow both!

I give credit to Gillick for the way he crafts his semiotic games, but I get the sense we’re just meant to be beguiled by his multifaceted practice (and his multitasking presence, redistributed across a network of art-world and academic situations), charmed by his intellectual resourcefulness, and seduced by the metarhetorical operations wherein meaning is always held in suspended animation. Ambiguity as art form, a variety of (neo)postmodernism. The putatively relational dynamic that Gillick engineers is the mirror image of an insider’s game of linguistic, semantic, and social twists and turns, more conservative in ideology than we might want to admit. My concern is that his is a postcritical discourse, ultimately suggesting that our current social and economic processes are too complicated for the audience to understand. In this scenario, it may be the public that becomes a “super whatnot.”

—Joshua Decter



View of “Liam Gillick,” 2008.